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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the literature about Walt Disney and his many diverse enterprises. In order to show how the processes of production shape and affect the final content and form of items of popular culture, the paper first discusses some of the many technological advances achieved by the Disney studio. Disney's groundbreaking use of color and sound and his achievement of greater realism through the introduction of the illusion of depth and more precise movement were crucial factors in his studio's rapid ascension to a preeminent position among makers of animated films. It seems likely that the sheer technical brilliance and novelty of the films had as much to do with their popularity as did their content. How the internal processes of production--artists' schools, bureaucratization of the studio chain, and specialization--also affected the content and quality of Disney's popular cultural products are discussed in the second part of the paper. Merchandising and distribution also played a role in building the Disney empire. The third section provides an overview of the ways that Disney capitalized on the enormous popularity of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and the characters from virtually every film he produced to set up an elaborate, and extremely lucrative system of licensing, franchising, and merchandising. The concluding section considers commentary pertaining to Disney's adaptations of classics in children's literature. The literature shows near unanimous agreement that Disney's treatment of many of the classic of children's literature has been disastrous. Some questions for further research are proposed. (Author/RM)

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A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS INC. ON AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Introduction

In recent years researchers from a variety of disciplines have begun to recognize that the myriad products of our "popular culture"--i.e., novels, magazines, motion pictures and television programs--comprise a body a material worthy of serious scholarly attention. Long disdained and considered "trash" by traditionally trained scholars, popular culture is now viewed as a significant area of research that promises to yield important insights into the "dynamics of the relationship between self and society"[1] (Rollin, 1976, p. 194). Within the realm of popular culture, the name of Walt Disney is unquestionably one of the most important and ubiquitous. Evidence in support of this assertion is available in the testimonials of Disney's many admirers. Former California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Max Rafferty (1967), for example, called him "the greatest educator of the century." In a paper presented at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, Dr. Michael Brody (1976) described Disney as "a prime shaper of contemporary myths" and suggested that his company's symbol of the world wearing mouse's ears "may be more than just a very imaginative man's childhood fantasy"[2] (p. 359). The respected English political cartoonist David Low (1942), in a much quoted statement, labelled Disney "the most significant figure in graphic arts since Leonardo" (p. 18). Finally, Richard Schickel (1968), in the conclusion of his account of the life, times, art, and commerce of Walt Disney --a book that remains, the best comprehensive critical overview of the man and his work--suggested that Disney's real significance was as "a primary force in the expression and formation of American mass consciousness" (pp. 360-361).

This paper provides an overview of the literature about Disney and his many diverse enterprises. Given Disney's enormous and pervasive impact on, to name just a few, the art of the animated film, children's literature publication, the utilization of fantasy characters to merchandise toys, books, and a wide

assortment of other products, and finally the conception and construction of amusement parks, it is surprising that so little has actually been written about him. What is most striking, however, about this literature, aside from its paucity, is its diversity. Opinions range from the laudatory tributes of the sort cited above to those who, for example, accuse Disney of seeking to reduce "the whole world, the universe, and all man's striving for dominion over self and nature...to a sickening blend of cheap formulas packaged to sell" (Halevy, 1958, p. 511). Others, like the distinguished children's literature librarian Frances Clarke Sayers (1973) castigate Disney as a "shameless nature faker in his fictionalized animal stories" and argue that his adaptations of the classics in children's literature "ignore genuine feeling" and bludgeon "the imagination of children with mediocrity" (pp. 116-117). Finally, there is the still more strident criticism of Dorfman and Mattelart (1975), third world nationalists who were staunch supporters of the deposed Chilean President Salvator Allende, who view the many widely circulated Disney comics as carriers of capitalist and imperialist values and ideology that pave the way for third world colonization and exploitation.

What follows is an attempt to seek a measure of balance from amongst these conflicting viewpoints and to formulate questions for further research. The present time is particularly opportune for such undertakings for several reasons. The first is that December 16, 1981 will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Walt Disney and an assessment of the fate of the far flung Disney empire a decade and half after his passing seems appropriate. It is also thirteen years since the publication of The Disney Version (1968), Richard Schickel's aforementioned critical biography of Disney's life and career. While articles about the various Disney enterprises have appeared since that time, there are no recent works that match the depth

and comprehensiveness of Schickel's definitive volume. In addition, because so much significant work has been done in the area of popular cultural analysis since that time, it is important that Disney's work be reevaluated in light of the insights provided by this scholarship. Finally, the critical acclaim that greeted this summer's release of the Fox and the Hound--the first full length animated film by the new generation of animators at the Disney studio (Schickel, 1981, p. 69)--is an indication that despite the master's passing, the Disney empire has retained its vitality.[3]

This paper begins with a brief overview of the dominant lines of inquiry of those arguing for the need for a sociology of cultural forms. I then examine some of the extant literature on Disney in light of these concerns and principles. Of particular interest will be matters that, until quite recently, have not been of interest to those who critically examine popular culture forms such as films, and literature. The next section considers commentary pertaining to Disney's adaptations of classics in children's literature. This discussion concludes by proposing some questions for further research.

Research in Popular Culture

Research and criticism of the various forms of popular cultural differ in several respects from traditional art and literary criticism. The first stems from the subject matter of analysis. Traditional artistic and literary analysis has historically focused almost exclusively on "elite" or "high" culture, the so-called "great works." As a result, attention has been given to but a limited number of books, paintings, etc. deemed worthy of critical scrutiny thereby leaving the overwhelming majority of the literary and artistic output beyond the purview of the critics. In contrast, students of popular culture attend precisely to those materials which the traditionalists view as being unfit for scholarly attention. Popular culture, defined as "mass media content, packaged and designed to appeal to one or more national taste cultures" (Hirsch, 1977,

p. 401), is thus seen to include any and all art and literature as well as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, advertising, posters, etc.

A second difference between analyses of popular versus elite culture pertains to the range or scope of the analysis. The dominant school of literary criticism since the early 1960's--the "new critical" orientation--has been primarily concerned with the internal analysis of texts. More specifically critics have been interested in how literary works are able to generate emotional and intellectual respones in readers. While this approach is certainly important, Kelly (1974) has argued that defining literature solely in terms of its inherent power to elicit responses has the effect of reducing the need to examine the complex forces that might otherwise be presumed to shape both the creation and effect of literature. An additional consequence of supposing that literary works are independent or autonomous of social and historical forces is, according to Kelly, the belief that the study of literature could be conducted "free from political and ideological influences thus permitting the claim that aesthetic judgements are largely independent of the critic's cultural context" (p. 144).

Many students of popular culture have recognized these crucial points for some time. That is, they have understood that an adequate analysis of "popular objects" requires that such objects be scrutinized in relation to the specific socioeconomic and historical context from whence they came. In addition, scholars have recently begun to take into account the fact that popular culture is "obviously shaped by market forces in their inspiration, production distribution and consumption" (Peterson, 1977, pp. 385-6). Consequently, popular culturalists have found it impossible to adhere strictly to the central tenent of new criticism that the only legitimate subject of scholarly attention was the work itself, "read or seen or heard in the abstract." As Peterson (1977) stated:

> Not only did the popular cultural orientation tend to put the artifacts of culture in social context, but it also brought the academic scholar out of the ivory-tower assumption that intellectual discourse could take place abstracted from its ideological context (p. 386).

Students of popular culture thus make social, economic, and ideological factors as well as the processes of cultural productions, and consumption, and distribution central to their analyses, (e.g., Becker, 1974, DiMaggio, 1977, Eagelton, 1976, Fine, 1977, Golding, 1978, Peterson, 1977, Real, 1977, Varis, 1976). In regard to the latter point, for example, DiMaggio (1977) was critical of both conservative and radical critics of mass culture[4] for their failure to take into account the fact that in industrial democracies like the United States most items of popular culture are "produced by profit-making firms operating under the constraints of the market place" (p. 437). The fact that popular culture is big business is, therefore, viewed as exerting a profound influence on the kinds of products made available to the public. DiMaggio (1977) did, in fact, suggest that the "core characteristics of 'mass culture'" are "attributes of industries, not societies" (p. 437). Consideration of some of the literature and commentary in Disney in light of the thesis that popular culture must be examined as big business will, I believe, provide important insight into Walt Disney's place in American culture and yield insight into his phenomenal success.

Disney as Business I: Technical Developments

Walt Disney Productions is one of "the most successful conglomerates in America."[5] In 1978 its assets totaled close to one billion dollars (Davis, 1980, p. 144), and this figure does not entirely reflect either the $800 million in capital investment being put into ESPOT, The Experimental Prototype of the Community of Tomorrow, being built on a cite adjacent to Walt Disney World in Orlanda, Florida, or the funds being invested in the new Disneyland Park under construction near Tokyo, Japan. With reported total revenues of $914 million dollars in 1981 it is clear that by virtually any standard, Disney

is big business. The remarkable saga of how a lad from a small town in Kansas parlayed a dream into an empire is one that has undoubtably struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of his countless fans. Disney's rags to riches story, provided living proof the Horatio Alger legend was more than a myth. The story of his life and his uncanny ability to imbue his work with the values, ideals, and world views of his audience[6] are certainly two of the most obvious explanations of both his success and what McReynolds (1971) described as "the pseudo-religious aura which has come to surround his name before and since his death" (p. 205).

An adequate explanation of the Disney phenomena must, however, go beyond his unquestioned sensitivity to his audience's values and beliefs. One must instead look to the ways that Disney was able to utilize advances in motion picture technology to build the foundation of his empire, the animated motion picture. Disney's "unerring appreciation of technical developments and how to use them for profit" (McReynolds, 1971, p. 22), his studio's systematic rationalization of the process of producing animated films and his leadership in the development of techniques of total product merchandising are underlying, and rarely understood, explanations of his astounding success. Thus the key to an understanding of Disney's dominant position in the field of mass culture is to be found in his development of a system of production and distribution, factors previously said to be central to current research in popular culture.

Disney's improbable career began in Kansas City with a series of frustrations and failures that paralleled those of his father (Schickel, 1968, pp. 55-113). Moving to Los Angeles in 1923 he continued to struggle until he achieved his first great success, Steamboat Willy, a five minute cartoon that catapaulted both him and his "star," Mickey Mouse, into the public limelight. The success of this first animated film to fully integrate sound into a cartoon foreshadowed Disney's genius as an exploitor of techological innovation. Here, as in other

instances, Disney demonstrated an ability to capitalize and build on the work of others.

Animators throughout the 1920's had been extending the range of movement the camera could record; animals were made to move like humans, inanimate objects were given life-like qualities and emotions were given visual expression . It was Disney, however, who saw that sound was a force that would transform the movies and not merely be an addition to them (Schickel, p. 130). Unlike those who supposed that the addition of sound would make films similar to stage plays, Disney had the foresight to recognize that a totally new form of creative expression was in the offing. That is, he seemed to sense the coming of a new medium, one in which, in the words of Panofsky, "what we hear remains, for good or worse, inextricably fused with that which we see; the sound, articulate or not, cannot express any more than is expressed, at the same time by visual movement..." (quoted by Schickel, p. 131).

> In short...Disney was the first film maker to resolve the aesthetically disruptive fight between sight and sound through the simple method of fusion, making them absolutely "coexpressible" with neither one dominant nor carrying more than its fair share of the film's weight. To put it more crudely--and rather as one imagines many of his first audiences might have put it--"he, made things come out right" (Schickel p. 131).

A detailed account of the impact and significance of the technological advances pioneered by Disney and his studio has yet to be written. As is the case with many aspects of Disney's work, some suggestive description and commentary does exist but with the exception of Schickel's now dated work and Dorfman and Mattelart's (1975) study of "imperialist ideology" in the unnumerable Disney comics available in third world nations, systematic analyses are lacking. For the purposes of the present paper it is only possible to enunerate some of these developments and to suggest some possible directions for future research.

Disney's habit of plowing the profits from a given venture back into the business enabled his rapidly growing studio to turn out short, animated features in quick succession. The success of Steamboat Willy in particular lead him to expand and experiment with a series of cartoons (the "Silly Symphonies") in which music played a key role. Flowers and Trees, one of these Silly Symphonies, was released in 1932 in Technicolor's new three-color process for film. Although the process was still imperfect, it caused a revolution in the animated cartoon industry and became the first cartoon to win an Oscar (Schickel, 1968, p. 148; DeRoos, 1963, pp. 174-175). Color processes, like sound systems, had been skulking around the edge of the movie business long before they were adapted (Schickel, 1968, p. 148). It was Disney, however, who recognized its potential and seized upon the process. Disney's early interest in the new color process also led to an agreement with Technicolor that gave his studio the exclusive rights to the three-color process until 1935. This forced his competitors to make do with inferior color processes, a fact that gave Disney a tremendous advantage over his rivals (Schickel, 1968, p. 150).

Disney's almost obsessive drive would not allow him to rest with these considerable accomplishments. He had long dreamed of producing a feature length cartoon, an idea that was scorned by Hollywood moguls who were certain it would bring ruin to the rising Disney studio. Disney persisted and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs went into production and proved to be an enormous artistic and financial success. The film's importance to the present discussion, however, lies in several developments that occurred during its production.

Disney's keen ability to analyze what he wanted and to find people who could carry out his wishes is evidenced in his decision to begin a school to train his own animators. He understood that in order to sustain an audience's interest for a full length feature required that he "add something" to the crude though forceful style of the early Mickey films (Schickel, 1968, p. 178). The art of

animation had, in fact, been progressing, characters were being increasingly drawn in the round and in perspective in contrast to the earlier flat figures (DeRoos, 1963, p. 175). Disney's school was thus geared to teaching his vision of such basics of the art as capturing the illusion of three-dimensionality in a two dimensional medium and teaching tricks of perspective and exaggeration. Once "trained," the Disney animators also made a systematic effort to solve the key problem of movement. Because animals were the subjects of his films, Disney employed nature photographers to film animals in their natural habitat so that his artists could have suitable models for their work. This footage ultimately became the basis of Disney's highly regarded nature films which he began releasing in 1949 (Schickel, 1968, pp. 180-181).

Disney's enormous efforts at art education, and in the improvement of sound and color film processes were fed by his desire to achieve greater realism in his films. The final breakthrough was achieved with his studio's invention of the "multiplane camera," a device that made possible a far greater illusion of depth than had been here-to-fore possible (Schickel, 1968, pp. 194-195). Disney's critics are generally divided on whether his drive for realism in the cartoon medium was a positive step for the art form and more specifically, whether the multiplane camera was "a genuinely useful artistic tool" (Schickel, 1968, pp. 195-201). Despite these largely aesthetic debates, the overall impact of his efforts are clear and have been summarized by Schickel (1968).

> To be sure, the desire to reproduce nature more accurately led, at first, to a higher quality of work at every stage of the film-making process, and the Disney studio must receive credit for seizing upon technical advance of all kinds, developing many of its own and then synthesizing all the discoveries in the field into a method of production that was commercially viable and wildly attractive to the public. Indeed, Disney's position became so dominant so quickly that it is fair to say that without his efforts it would not now be possible to call animation either an art or a profession; it would still be merely "the cartoon business."

> Moreover...color added an element to the cartoon that no artist, even the most abstract abstractionist, can do without, while the synchronization of visual imagery with musical sound definitively separated the film cartoon from its heritage, the newspaper cartoon, and gave it an expressive potential far above that of its ancestor (pp. 200-201).

This discussion of some of the many technological advances achieved by the Disney studio[7] was based on the premise that it is necessary to understand how the processes of production shape and effect the final content and form of items of popular culture. While a detailed exegesis of how Disney's refinement of animation technology led to specific changes in the content and form of his films is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that his groundbreaking use of color and sound, his achievement of greater realism through the introduction of the illusion of depth and more precise movement, were crucial factors in his studio's rapid ascension to a preeminent position among makers of animated films. It seems likely--and this undoubtably a question open to empirical investigation--that the sheer technical brillance and novelty of the films had as much (probably more at first) to do with their popularity as did the fact that the content of Disney films struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of many Americans, something about which more will be said below. In a similar vein, an explanation of the enormous popularity of the Star Wars films would have to take into account, among other things,[8] the film's remarkable special effects. In short, adequate understanding of any popular cultural phenomena--of which Disney is one of the most notable, examples--must take into account factors of production of the sort just discussed.

Disney as Business II: Rationalization of Production

Present day animation production is markedly different from the original mode of making animated films. Walt Disney, perhaps more than any other individual, was influential in developing and popularizing the animation process that phased out dramatic improvization, dramatic art, artists, and artistry"[9]

(Goldsen, 1978, p. 60).

Disney had long been vexed by the implicit lack of control in early system and was driven by a desire to rationalize the here-to-fore chaotic process of cartoon creation. The almost accidental invention of the "story board"--a system of sketching out story sequences instead of writing them--proved to be a significant step in bringing this process under his complete control (Schickel, 1968, pp. 146-149). The establishment of a story department that was staffed with animators most gifted in developing imaginative storylines was a further advance to this end. This last development, which firmly and forever separating word men from picture men people in the early, creative stages of production (Schickel, 1968, p. 147) constituted the beginnings of a study drive for specialization, that diversion of labor that has characterized production in capitalist industries since the industrial revolution.

The rapid growth of his studio and the resulting influx new artists, necessitated by the sheer size of projects like Snow White, was an important fact leading to the establishment of the aforementioned artist's school. This school insured efficiency as well as consistency in the studio's output as the uniform technical mastery achieved by the students eliminated considerable waste. Rapid expansion also provided the rationale for the bureaucratization of the studio's chain of command and specialization became, in the words of Schickel (1968), "the new watchword on Hyperion Avenue" (pp. 188-9), the home of the Disney studio. Schickel's discussion of this relentless push for an even further division of labor are particularly significant in light of DiMaggio's (1977) previously discussed suggestion that the core characteristics of mass culture are "attributes of industries."

> Without, apparently, giving a moment's conscious thought to the matter, Disney in the late Thirties was recapitulating the history of the entire industrial revolution behind his Spanish stucco walls, breaking down film production into smaller and smaller components,

> just as all other forms had been broken down since Eli Whitney began experimenting with the production line[10] (Schickel, 1968, p. 189).

Schickel argued that much of this specialization was "inevitable" given the complexity of the task of creating an animated film. He was, however, mindful of the loss of the artist's personality, what he termed--"evidence of the single, shaping hand," and the concommitant dimunition of aesthetic value that was a by-product of specialization (198-90). Also lost as a result of the rationalizing of the production process was the remarkable sense of community, "the excitement of exploration and experiment" that characterized the earlier "golden years" at Disney. Individual craftsmen lost their sense of identity and "suffered a new form of anonymity" that had the effect of crushing individual initiative (pp. 184, 191). These factors and Disney's hard-driving insistent ways[11] laid the seeds for the revolt that culminated in the bitterly divisive strike of 1941. Many critics, including Schickel feel that the studio never recovered the artistic vitality of those earlier years. While this loss of artistic vitality did not affect the steady growth in the profitability of Disney's company (Forbes, 1977, MacDonald, 1966) the labor dispute that led to the strike, and was at least in part a result of the press of rationalizing the process of animation, "brought an end to the questing spirit of the Disney studio in its glorious morning" (Schickel, 1981, p. 69).

The foregoing discussion has sought to demonstrate that an understanding of popular cultural forms such as the animated film must look to dynamics of the internal processes of production such as those just described. Such analyses can bring to light factors that effect the content and quality of popular cultural products that are simply lost when critics limit their investigations to an exclusive concern with an aesthetic analysis of a text or film. An adequate analysis must, however, go still further and examine the role

which merchandising and distribution played in the building of the Disney empire.

Disney as Business III: Mechandising and Distribution

In a fascinating study of folk and fairy tales Zipes (1979) discussed some of the ways that cultural forms are "produced, organized, and exchanged as commodities within a capitalist socio-economic system so that they no longer relate to the needs and experiences of those who create them." According to this view, "cultural objects appear to possess a life of their own beyond the control of the actual creators who also lose control over their own destiny" (pp. 96-97). Zipes' analyses demonstrated the ways in which folk, fairy tales and other objects of childhood fantasy are put to "instrumental uses." That is, they are used "purely as a means to an end" (p. 9), ends that transcend the original intentions of their authors. It is Zipes' contention that "the Walt Disney industry and other conglomemtes utilized "the fantasy of children and adults" in an instrumental fashion in the hope of "making of a profit" (p. 176). This section provides an overview of the ways that Disney (and many have followed his lead) has capitalized on the enormous popularity of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and the characters from virtually every film he has produced to set up an elaborate, and extremely lucrative, system of licenaing, franchising and merchandising.

Franchising or licensing refers to the system in which the manufacturers of watches, dolls, toys, books, wallpaper, and a myriad of other products,[12] pay a licensing fee and or royalties to have a character such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck appear on their product. Goldsen (1978) referred to this system as one in which companies like Disney (more recently the "Children's Television Workshop" that produces Sesame Street) cash in on an "aura that becomes discernable whenever symbols are widely recognized and socially shared" (p. 255). These franchising arrangements were not invented by Disney but he pioneered the application of "Hollywood's technique for mass production and total merchandising

of auras to the symbols of childhood" (Goldsen, 1978, p. 255). As May (1980) put it, Disney is "the patriarch of effective merchandising methods which play upon the emotions of immature audiences" (p. 213-214).

Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck are well known in every corner of the globe. As early as 1954, for example, it was estimated that a third of the world's population had seen at least one Disney film (Time, 1954, p. 42). Mickey and Donald are thus among the most important in a long list of licensed images that now inundate the pool of symbols that nourish children's imaginations all over the world. Noted for their characteristic ways of behaving and relating to each other, these often charming and amusing figures have become "mythic images in the culture of childhood, more powerful and more pervasive than even Mother Goose, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White and the Three Little Pigs"--all of whom have been taken over and merchandised by Disney (Goldsen, 1978, p. 256).

MacReynolds (1971) discussed Disney's remarkable success in convincing parents that their children will be deprived if they don't take them to every Disney movie. The key to this success has been the development of a formula[13] that has invested his name and his films with a "product symbolism" which is in many ways as recognizable as that associated with such stalwarts as Coca-Cola, Campbell Soup and Betty Crocker (pp. 31-32). Adults therefore know essentially what they will get when viewing a Disney film and given Disney's aforementioned sensitivity to the values and ideals of his audience, what they get is usually consonant with what they hold most dear. This includes such basic American beliefs as individualism, advancement through self help and strict adherence to the work ethic, and a supreme optimism in the possibility in the ultimate improvement of society through the progressive improvement in humankind (MacReynolds, 1974). In short, by catering to the "deepest needs of a human being, the need for orientation, for a sense of at-homeness in the world" Disney

was able to insure the success and financial profitability of first, his films and subsequently virtually every aspect of his business (MacReynolds, 1971, pp. 32-33).

Disney made certain that any warmth of feeling Mickey, his friends, and other movie characters generated in moviegoers would not cool off by forming a character-merchandising division to "keep those fires stoked" (Goldsen, 1978, p. 256). The process is actually a circular one in which movies generate an interest in the dolls, toys, and other products, which in turn heighten interest in the movie and then serve to sustain it until the next film. May (1980) summarized the basic approach:

> Walt Disney's career may be founded on elfen fantasy and hybrid corn, but it thrives on the hardest sell in Hollywood: The "total merchandising concept"...Once a decision is made to make picture, the marketing starts...All moves are geared to publicizing the final product and making money while you do it (quoted by May, 1980, pp. 210-211).

The success of Disney's licensing arrangements are legendary in the trade and Schickel (1967) reported "two certifiable economic miracles" that occurred during the depression that have become part of the folklore of the industry. One concerned how the Lionel Corporation--a manufacturer of toy trains--was rescued from receivership during the depression by the rapid sale of 230,000 hand cars featuring Mickey and Minnie. Similarly, the Ingersonol Watch Company was saved from deep financial trouble when it began to produce Mickey Mouse watches. Ten million were sold as of 1968 and the originals are now collectors items that are worth sums far in excess of their actual value (p. 163).

Merchandising is, of course, basic to American business and Disney saw no real conflict between his artistic or quasi-artistic creations and the development of a huge marketing operation. Anyone who has grown up in the past fifty years knows that they can expect to see some of the innumerable products bearing the Disney logo upon entering virtually any supermarket, toy store,

or drug and dime stores. These items were of little interest to Disney, and his concern with them was that they helped to publicize the thing he cared most about--his films and later his amusement parks. Nevertheless they did return a handsome profit and had the additional effect of constantly keeping his name in the minds' of his audience. Although Disney- licensed products tend to be somewhat more durable, well-designed and attractive than most of the junk they compete with, "they remain junk by almost any intelligent standard of toy manufacturers" (Schickel, 1968, pp. 164-165). What is perhaps more important to educators and especially to parents whose children clamor for Mickey Mouse lunch boxes, dolls and other assorted toys, is that Disney pioneered the system of capitalizing on the fascination, the aura, that surrounds the fantasy characters that populate movies and television shows. One could, in fact, probably make an accurate prediction of the kind of toys to be found in most stores simply by compiling a list of popular children's shows and movies. That Disney was little concerned with these products "as long as they were safe and well made" (Schickel, 1968, p. 165) testifies to his unwillingness to think beyond his immediate concern of building his business empire.

Art in America, Schickel (1968), reminds us, has long been justified primarily by the uses to which it could be put (i.e., by its instrumental value) and to Disney, and his entire generation, the social uses of art were "tolerable but not nearly so interesting--so magical--as the possibility of building a business on them or on their semblence." His success in building an empire based on the animated film and in making his name one of the best known in the world was, to most, far more intriguing than any of the products he created. It is this very fact that led Schickel to conclude that "Walt Disney's greatest creation was Walt Disney" (p. 44).

Shortly before he died Disney was asked to name the most rewarding experience of his life. His response was blunt and to-the-point: "The whole damn thing. The fact that I was able to build an organization and hold it" (Schickel, 1968, p. 38). Throughout his life, Disney displayed an almost obsessive determination to control every stage of production, including the marketing and distribution of his diverse enterprises. Disney's desire to control the distribution of his films stemmed from his early and bitter experiences in gaining suitable distribution arrangements for his films. In addition he had long been irritated by the heavy percentage of the grosses that went to the distributors. By creating his own distribution subsidiary, Buena Vista, Disney not only cut his costs considerably, but also made what Schickel (1968) characterized as "the final step in gaining complete control of (his) own destiny, complete freedom in the creation and exploitation of (his) products." Of perhaps even greater importance is the fact that control over the release of his films permitted more effective coordination with ancillary activities of the sort discussed above and in particular, the coordination of a film's release in a period when television viewing was greatest thus insuring that people were most likely to see commercials for it (p. 309). It is to Disney's pioneering use of television, both in its own right and as a means to market his wares, that the final part of this section is devoted.

Disney's attitude toward the new technology of television paralleled that which he took toward the previously discussed technologies of sound and color. That is, he seemed to have an intuitive, almost instinctive, ability to size up and exploit the possibilities presented by television to a degree unmatched by his contemporaries. In contrast, Disney's rivals in the movie business saw television only as a threat and watched in horror and dismay as television stole its audience (Schickel, 1968, pp. 19-20, 309-10). Disney, however, correctly

perceived that television offered an unprecedented opportunity to promote not only his films, but also his various merchandising interests, some of which developed as a direct result of television itself. In addition, television became a crucial vehicle in Disney's scheme to promote what one observer called "'the world's biggest toy for the world's biggest boy'--an amusement park of a quality and dimension no one but Disney and a few associates could quite envision"--Disneyland (Schickel, 1968, p. 310).

"The Mickey Mouse Club" premiered in October of 1955 and proved to be a phenomenon of remarkable proportion. Previously the commercial networks had seen little reason to cultivate the child audience as it was believed that it could not return revenues sufficient to justify major investment. The "Mickey Mouse Club," however, changed all of this and became one of (if not the first) television program to successfully "herd 'kiddies' into 'markets' through clever programing bulwarked by a merchandising and promotion system" (Goldsen, 1978, p. 257). The Disney experience made it quickly apparent to producers, stations, networks, and advertisers of children's programs that the child market held the potential for substantial profits and as a result, "the marketing of children became the accepted rationale behind programming targeted to them" (Goldsen, pp. 257-8).

Within but four months of the show's opening thirty-eight companies were manufacturing, promoting and selling "character merchandise such as Mickey Mouse Club hats, t-shirts, records, record players and even mouseguitars." As sales skyrocketed more and more manufacturers sought a piece of the action, "the right to attach to their merchandise a bit of the aura of the Mouse Club symbols--an aura that the love and trust of so many children had endowed them with" (Goldsen, p. 258).

Today the franchising system that Disney perfected is followed by virtually all of television, particularly shows directed toward the child audience. All producers turn out shows designed to exploit the aura that enjoyment, recognition and widespread sharing create around them. Hanna Barbera Productions, the producers of such shows as The Flintstones, Yogi Bear, Huckleberry Hound, for example, license over 1500 manufacturers who turn out approximately 4500 different products bearing the images of their immensely popular cartoon characters. The resulting system is one that belies the commonly held belief that commercials occur only during the breaks that lie outside of the show itself. In point of fact the entire program has become one giant ad promoting its props, its stars and itself (Goldsen, pp. 266, 267). The net effect and impact of this new pervasive, and uncritically accepted, tie-in between television programing and merchandising has been well summarized in Goldsen's (1978) important account of television's alarming and too little considered effects on contemporary society.

> When the children are not watching the shows, studying the stars, or playing with these dolls and games, they can sleep on sheets stamped with the same symbols. They can wear them as signs upon the bosoms of their T-shirts, bind them as time pieces on their arms. The songs they sing, the music they dance to, the rhymes they chant, the games and toys and puppets and dolls they play with, the food they eat, the fragrances they sniff, their vitamins and medicines, candy and chewing gum, clothes and furniture and coloring books--all, all, all, all, act like sausage casings which do not themselves nourish, but concentrate and bind together the stuff that does. All these commodities, now, collect and concentrate the auras that surround symbols, and feed children the very stuff that nourishes their minds (p. 271).

Walt Disney and Children's Literature

As was noted at the outset of this paper, opinion on the various aspects of Disney's work is divided. There is, however, near unanimous agreement that Disney's treatment of many of the classics of children's literature has been disasterous. Bart & Bart (1965), for example, while noting that Disney

seldom scrutinized, or even cared, about his company's children's books argued that "Disney books stand for an almost aggressive mediocrity" (p.2). Maurice Sendak, himself a celebrated author and illustrator of children's books admitted that in his early years he was "profoundly influenced" by Disney's work and viewed him as "a god." In later life, however, he came to see and understand "how Disney had despoiled beautiful stories and had abused the idea of animation" (quoted by Hentoff, 1969, pp. 334-5). Meigs, et. al, (1969), in their comprehensive history of children's literature, discussed the Disney adaptations of such children's classics as The Wind in the Willows, Winnie-the-Pooh, and Mary Poppins only in passing, but castigated him for destroying "the integrity of the original books, making widely available the mediocre and the tasteless" (p. 412). May (1978, 1980, 1981) lamented Disney's tendency "to replace the child's ability to pause in reflection on a book's theme by replacing the author's theme . . . with glitter." She decried the systematic ways in which story lines were changed to "depict a simple love story and a happy-ever-after theme." In short, May (1980) suggested that Disney's "literary creations are vast and mindless" (p. 212). All of these criticisms, however, pale in comparison to that made by Frances Clark Sayers (1973) who, in 1965, reacted vehemently to Dr. Max Rafferty's (1965) appraisal of Disney as "the greatest educator of the century." Rafferty's remarks appeared in the Los Angeles Times and Sayers responded with a letter that was later expanded in an interview that appeared first in The Horn Book magazine. Sayers' remarks are especially significant because they have become the almost obligatory starting point of criticism about Disney adaptations of children's literature.

The Sayers broadside against Disney was in relation to children's literature, "not in relation to the many other things he has done" (p. 125).

In regard to the literature, however, she found "almost everything objectionable" (p. 117). She blasted Disney first for his destruction of proportion in folk tales stating that his repeated tendency to sweeten the tales by focusing in the relationships between animals and characters like Snow White and Cinderella, not present in traditional versions, had the effect of destroying "the proportion and purpose of the story, the conflict and the resolution" (pp. 117-118). In regard to art and matters of illustration, Sayers claimed that "a major crime has been committed" (p. 120). The "Disney look," so lamented by Sayers was attributed to that fact that the books are done by the Disney staff. Lost in the process of "collective illustration"[14] are "the great qualities of an illustrator . . . his own style, his own conviction" (p. 120).

Sayers' ultimate concern was that because Disney books "consistently vulgarize the illustrations, oversimplify plot and limit vocabulary", children who are subject to prolonged exposure to his books "will lose their ability to respond to true whimsey and true art" (quoted by Bart & Bart, 1965, p. 2). Summarizing this concern Sayers (1973) stated:

> If everything is made so obvious that it asks for nothing of the readers, then after a while their ability to respond is atrophied. And they grow up as young people unable to take anything from a printed page, or they are bored because they haven't discovered the nuances, the differences of opinion, the differences of approach between one author and anothers[15] (p. 123).

In this discussion of the Disney children's books, Bart & Bart (1965) quoted an "eminent" but unnamed author of "a score of celebrated children's books" who expressed "absolute" bafflement that "a man who can create something like Disneyland can stand behind this fantastic outpouring of literary junk" (p.2). We have seen that others have expressed similar concern with "literary disneyism," a concern exacerbated by the fact that others, like

Hanna-Barbera, have emulated the style and format of Disney's publishing practices.[16] Disney's lack of interest in these reductions of children's classics has been noted and it is a fact that his entry into children's book publishing was accidental. The books were, in fact, part of his previously discussed "total marketing" concept, "exploitation items" designed to help promote Disney's motion pictures and, in turn, to benefit from the film's popularity." In short the ubiqitous Disney children's books were rarely considered anything more than "one of many tactical efforts in the overall strategy of merchandising the principal Disney products--movies, T.V., films and Disneyland" (Schickel, 1968, p. 353; Bart & Bart, 1965, p. 7).

The foregoing sampling of critical commentary about the Disney children's books illustrates once again the point emphasized in previous sections of this paper that an understanding of works of popular culture must take into account factors of production and distribution. The Disney books, intended and produced for mass-market consumption and designed as part of the corporation's overall marketing strategy, cannot be otherwise fully comprehended.

It is important to note that the basic thrust of the criticism thus far cited are aesthetic. Disney is essentially accused of violating the intent of the original authors of various works of children's literature, for "mongrelizing" and "Disnifying" them and then using them for instrumental purposes (like to promote his films). What has yet to be discussed in this paper and what is one of the present researcher's most pressing interests, is the nature of values and ideological commitments that are contained not only in the work of Disney, but in all products of popular culture.

The Ideology of Walt Disney

As has been previously noted, students of popular culture have moved

beyond purely aesthetic concerns and focused increasingly in the ideological messages and world views implicit in popular cultural forms.[17] The late motion picture critic Robert Warshaw, for example, maintained that popular, mass culture provides "a fixed system of moral and political attitudes" (quoted by McReynolds, 1971, p. 30).

Interest in how symbolic forms such as literature, films, and music contribute to what Cohen (1971) referred to as "the shaping of men's minds" derives, at least in part, from anthropological research that has indicated that the essence of culture is to be found in both the intellectual and material symbols that people respond to in their social relations and in meeting the demands of everyday life. Many anthropologists do, in fact, believe that people in all societies are more likely to respond to "cultural symbols rather than objective reality," and that the actual symbolizations of cultural life are learned as a result of "systematic and consistent experiences to which the individual is exposed in the course of growing up," rather than being rooted in some aspect of race or biology (p. 19). A given society's culture thus constitutes a series of mechanisms that foster the creation of individuals able to meet the imperatives of the society in which they will participate as a mature adult, "especially in respect to the maintenance of effective social relations" (p. 21).

Cohen's distinction between socialization and education is a useful one as we undertake a consideration of the role of Disney as a shaper of American mass consciousness. Disney has been extensively involved in the production of educational films and while his adaptations of children's literature are found in many American classrooms, the present discussion is less concerned with his role in education--"the inculcation of standardized and stereotyped knowledge skills, values, and attitudes by means of standardized and stereo-

typed procedures"--than with his role in the more general process of socialization. Disney and in particular the myriad products produced by Disney's diverse enterprises are rather considered agents in the more generalized process of socialization, "the activites that are devoted to the inculcation and elicitation of basic motivational and cognitive patterns through ongoing and spontaneous interaction with parents, siblings, kinsmen, and other members of the community" (Cohen, 1971, p. 22).

As Schickel (1968) points out repeatedly on his account of Disney's life and commerce, Disney was very much a product of his middle class, midwestern American background. It is not, therefore, surprising that his work was infused with the values and ideological commitments that we have come to associate with that background. Like many of his contemporaries, Disney was concerned that the old fashion American virtues of self-help, the work ethic, and an optimistic belief in the perfectability of humankind was being undermined by rapid industrialization and changes in social values and mores. Disney treasured the valued he portrayed in his movies and books and he used them "as a means to subtly support his own image of middle America's strengths and U. S. societal weaknesses. He made stories that reflected his own ideology, an ideology that was based upon innate prejudices and practical experiences (Schickel, 1968, p. 40; May, 1981, p. 466). Stated more directly:

> Disney media products typify fundamental assumptions of the dominant culture but in a utopian, idealized form . . . Disney products are mass, not elite, and they come through many media and themes rather than in a unified corpus. Nevertheless, Disney's work typifies twentieth century America's self image and world view much as Dante's work typified medieval Catholicism. Both idealize fundamental characteristics into utopian worlds of absolutes[18] (Real, 1977, p. 47).

Disney repeatedly scoffed at those who read things into his work. He

viewed himself as little more than an entertainer and claimed to never really want to be more than just that. Despite disclaimers of this sort, Disney became, in the minds of his public far more than just a purveyor of entertainment. As Schickel (1968) notes with not a little condension: "He became a kind of rallypoint for the subliterates of our society, the chosen leader for the desultory--and ambiguous--rear guard action they were trying to fight against a rapidly changing cultural climate" (p. 339).

McReynolds (1971), whose analysis of Disney speaks in terms of his being entirely consistent with the "American Grain," suggested that the basic thrust of Mickey Mouse was as a protector of accepted morality. Decidedly well adjusted " . . .Mickey has many of the qualities associated with the Boy Scout, who is customarily on the side of law and order and conformism." McReynolds does, in fact, suggest that part of Mickey's appeal is the reassurance he provides children by demonstrating that "submitting oneself to the value of a given order ends in well-being, rewards, and acceptance" (p. 90).

Similar interpretations of the conservative orientation that underlies Disney products are available. Released at the height of the depression, The Three Little Pigs was an artistic and financial success and became "a heartening call to the people of a troubled country. Its optimistic tone stressed "self-reliance, the old virtues of solid, conservative building, and of keeping one's house in order" (Schickel, 1968, p. 154). Likewise, the 1934 "Silly Symphony," The Ant and the Grasshopper became a demonstration of nature's support of the work ethic which McReynolds (1971) suggested dominated the thinking of Disney's audience (p. 58).

Finally Zipes' (1979) interpretation of Snow White also attempted to see it in relation to the great depression during which it was produced. To Zipes, the many changes Disney wrought in the film had the effect of making knowing

ones' place and doing ones' job dutifully "the categorical imperatives of the film." The fact that work was difficult to find and worker discontent led to violent strikes and the rise of a strong socialist movement suggested to Zipes that government and industry were compelled to offer "new deals" to pacify people and discourage active opposition while maintaining the basic structure of the American capitalist system. Zipes suggested that implicit in Snow White is an image of America as one happy family pulling together to clean up the economic mess. Such a message, he maintained, "was important to disseminate if capitalism was to remain the dominant form of production" (p. 114). Zipes interpretation is consistent with the analyses in Real's (1977) fascinating case studies of various types of "mass-mediated culture" that argues that the net effect of mass culture "is to maintain ideological hegemony and legitimize the status quo" (p. 20).

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

In his discussion of the "political passions" periodically evoked by Mickey Mouse in the decade of the 1930's, Schickel (1968) suggested that it is folly to over interpret "essentially innocent popular culture material in light of any ideology--political, psychological, religious or even literary" (p. 166). The foregoing account of Zipes' (1979) interpretation of Snow White may be taken by some as vivid illustration of just that point. Zipes' analysis is admittedly problematic and it does appear that he has forced the material into his preconceived view of the world. However, dismiss the crucial notion that the forms of popular culture are related to the fundamental organizational patterns of a society is a folly of equal magnitude.

Popular cultural analysts of a variety of political and methodological persuasions have made clear the fact that popular culture is an important source of political, moral and ideological beliefs. As Real put it:

> Popular mass-mediated cultural expressions "fix" reality both by receiving and transmitting dominant patterns of perception, structures of feelings, cognitive maps, and cultural norms. They represent the "central zone of a cultural system" (p. 84).

Recent analyses of mystery and crime stories by Cawalti (1976), Western films by Wright (1975), children's historical fiction by the present author (Taxel, 1980) and those collected in the Real volume have provided some impressive evidence that these diverse culture forms, at least in part, mirror the dominant ideological structures and concerns of specific historical moments.

The sort of research needed, however, must extend the scope of analysis to include the many complex variables discussed throughout this paper. These must include

-traditional aesthetic values and concerns

-the ways in which the backgrounds, experiences and intentions of authors, illustrators, editors and producers contribute to a particular work of popular culture

-the ways that changes in the publishing and film industries have affected these products of our culture

-the impact of advances in technology, marketing, distribution

-the ways that the dominant ideological configurations or "structures of feeling" are reflected in the culture of a society

-the ways audiences, the consumers of culture, receive and transform the meanings implicit in culture by virtue of their own experience and history

Future work should be directed toward the specific analysis of Disney media products such as the many instructional materials currently produced by the Disney empire. These studies need to make the factors discussed in this paper central foci of the analysis.

(1) The year 1967 and the founding of the Journal of Popular Culture is a milestone date in the popular culture movement which Peterson (1977) claims was founded in the 1960's (p. 285).

(2) As a practicing child psychiatrist Brody (1976) suggested to his colleagues that familiarity with "Disney and his creations may open doors to understanding many different children" (p. 358)

(3) The ongoing construction of the $800 million, 600 acre experimental Prototype of the Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) adjacent to Disneyworld is further indication of this fact. In 1980 the total revenues of Walt Disney Productions reached a healthy $914 million. (Maynard, 1981, p. 3-B).

(4) Conservatives suggest that mass culture's contents are determined solely by the demands of the masses who, estranged from the wholesome influence of traditional communal groups, let their libidinal urges reign. Radicals argue that the disoriented mass accepts with enthusiasm whatever it is served: manipulated elites provide a steady diet of cultural T.V. dinners to program their ostensible free subjects into apathy and dull acquiescence. Leisure is "colonized" and creative pursuits succumb to "those passive amusements, entertainments, and spectacles...offered as substitutes for life itself" (Di Maggio, 1977, pp. 436-437).

(5) See, for example, "The Disney Way with the Dollar" in Forbes Magazine (March 15, 1977) and MacDonald (1961).

(6) McReynolds (1971) quotes Ben Fong-Torres, (editor of Rolling Stone Magazine) statement that Disney used his artistry to reflect "what people are already into" (p. 17). A 1954 Time Magazine cover story on Disney suggested that his "principal strength" was his "deep, intuitive identification with the common impulses of common people" (Time, 1954, pp. 43-44).

(7) Disney also introduced sterophonic sound "15 years before it was generally used in motion pictures" in 1940 with the release of Fantasia. Disney also pioneered the development of life-size three-dimensional figures in the performance of shows, complete with music and voice. For more on "audio-animatronics," see Bierman (1976), Goldsen (1978, pp. 61-2), and Schickel (1968, pp. 332-7).

(8) See Zipes (1979, pp. 117-19) for some interesting speculation of the sources of the popularity of Star Wars.

(9) Finch (1975) stated that "everything is preplanned. Nothing is left to the temperment of stars, to the day-to-day inspirations of director and camera-man, or to the vagaries of light and weather." It is, in short, "the most completely controlled form of film-making imaginable" (p. 154).

(10) See Braverman's (1974) seminal treatment of the development of the labor process under capitalism.

(11) Ezra Goodman, writing a 1954 cover story on Disney for Time, found "both apathy and fear at the prison-like Disney studio." Some of the cartoonists referred to the studio as the "Donald Dachau Plant." The editors of Time, however, refused to print this derogatory information about Disney (MacReynold, 1971, p. 8).

Bill Peet, today a popular author-illustrator of children's books, worked at Disney for over 27 years as a combination sketch artist-storyman. Recently he gave the following "sweet and sour" assessment of the life at the "fantasy factory."

> Pleasing Mr. D year after year was nearly impossible, and once you were in Walt's dog house there was no easy way out.
>
> Walt was indeed a tyrant and he ruled his animation empire with an iron hand--and yet he became very much the benevolent father figure to many of we flat-broke, homeless young artists who came there to work in the thirties (Peet, personal correspondence).

(12) Schickel (1968) reported that during the fifties Mickey Mouse alone was licensed to appear on more than 5000 different items (p. 164). Donald Duck "toidy seats" are among the many products bearing the imprint of Disney characters.

(13) McReynolds (1971) and Schickel (1968) provide the best critical assessments of this formula.

(14) The fact that the illustrations of Disney books are the results of a collaborative process is yet another example of how the processes of literary product effect the final content and form of a cultural product.

(15) Although in basic agreement with Sayers, Bart & Bart (1965) stated that though Disney books have "mongrelized the classics, they have provided some rudimentary familiarity with aspects of these books and this may encourage some children at a later date to take a look at the originals" (p. 34). May (1980), however, expressed alarm that "most young people have a stronger identity to Disney editions of folklore than they do to the originals, and that they generally prefer Disney's techniques, even if they are shown how he changed the intent of the story" (p. 61). This is precisely the concern voiced by Sayers (1973).

(16) Both the Disney and the Hanna-Barbera books are published by Western Printing Company, which is located in Racine, Wisconsin.

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